Why Do Kids Join Street Gangs?

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There are many reasons why kids join gangs, but like most youth activities, whether criminal or otherwise, most kids join gangs for companionship and love.

The desire to belong to a gang may stem from a variety of motives, but the one thing all gangs have in common is a claim on turf and territory. A gang’s turf may be a block, a neighborhood, or an entire area of the city. Members wear the gang colors, or a particular style of clothes and symbols, which usually indicates luxury and power in certain neighborhoods. Gangs have leaders, and sometimes officers.

One misconception about joining a gang is the thought of getting rich. Some young people think gang members are rich, drive expensive cars, and don’t have to work. However, very few gang members get rich. Most of their money goes in one hand and out the other to support flash and style rather than for living. Drug dealing is actually hard and dangerous work. Dealers are always on the job. They are always on guard, watching for police or rival gangs. They are constantly in danger of being killed. The odds of surviving are not in their favor.

One attraction to gangs is the loyalty members seem to have for each other. Gangs seem to provide an instant group of best friends. When joining a gang, you must go through initiation to prove you are worthy. In some gangs, initiation involves committing a crime, or new members might have to “walk the line,” as each member beats him, while he cannot fight back. Female gang members are either “beat in” or “sexed in.” Initiations are generally very brutal.

Someone who makes the choice to join a gang usually sets his life up to end in one of two ways… jail or death. Gangs can make you feel important, can make you feel that you belong and can even make you feel rich. But is the choice to join a gang worth the destruction caused in the gang members' lives and in the community?